

STATEMENT OF REP. JOHN CONYERS, JR.
Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property Subcommittee
Oversight Hearing on “The United States Copyright Office”
May 2, 2001

I would like to commend the Copyright Office for its tremendous efforts over the past few years to enforce the copyright laws. The lines in copyright used to be in black and white, but the advent of technology has turned them gray.

While the Internet provides limitless opportunities for the spread of information, it also allows the unlimited copying and distribution of copyrighted works without the payment of royalties. And thanks to services like Napster, the American public has become addicted to obtaining music and other content for free off the Internet and may not easily give up that privilege. Despite this pressure to let content roam free, the Copyright Office has done a remarkable job in the past few years of studying such timely issues as the anti-circumvention of copyright protection technology and the streaming of content over the Internet.

The Office also is playing an instrumental role in helping Congress ensure that the copyright laws apply equally to private citizens and the States. Sovereign immunity can no longer be used as an excuse for infringement.

At the same time, the Office is addressing the needs of copyright users through its efforts to promote digital distance education. These efforts will enable schools and universities to teach their students anywhere on the globe while respecting the parameters of intellectual property rights.

Unfortunately, many have criticized the Office for issuing decisions that strictly apply the copyright laws to works on the Internet. It's important to remember that the Copyright Office is neither pro-copyright nor anti-copyright; it is Congress that has made the determination to extend copyright protection to digital works. The Copyright Office interpreted the laws that we wrote and should not be criticized for clarifying our intent.

On a final note, thanks in part to this Subcommittee and the explosion of technology, the Copyright Office's workload has increased dramatically. I hope we can all work with congressional appropriators to give the Office the additional resources it needs to continue serving its customers in a timely and professional manner.